

S.O.S. save ontario's species


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2007 May 16

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Ontario Passes Best Endangered Species Act in the Country

All parties vote for strong legislation

Toronto, Ontario – Today, Ontario's leading environmental organizations are hailing Ontario's new *Endangered Species Act* as the best in the country. The new law balances a strong, science-based approach to protecting endangered plants and animals with the flexibility needed to address socio-economic concerns.

During today's final vote in the Legislature, the new law received broad support from all of the province's major political parties. The *Act* replaces outdated and ineffective legislation dating from 1971 and offers new hope for over 200 endangered plants and animals found in Ontario.

"We'd like to thank all the MPPs who voted for this Bill," says Dr. Rick Smith, Executive Director of Environmental Defence. "Support crossed party lines, demonstrating that Ontarians of all political stripes care deeply about our natural heritage and are committed to preserving it for future generations."

The new legislation is the first in Canada to combine mandatory habitat protection with a science-based approach to listing species for protection. It also requires the development of strategies to help species recover to healthy population levels.

"This new law is, without a doubt, the best Endangered Species Act in Canada," says Robert Wright, Counsel for Sierra Legal. "It empowers the government and all Ontarians to be stewards, and ensures the protection of the endangered plants and animals in the province."

"From an ecological perspective, the new law covers the critical bases," concurs Rachel Plotkin, Policy Analyst for the David Suzuki Foundation. "Ontario is home to about 40 per cent of Canada's endangered species, and the *Act* sets a high bar for their protection."

The new legislation also addresses socio-economic concerns in a number of ways. It provides for permits and agreements to accommodate resource development under certain circumstances. It also comes with an \$18 million stewardship fund to help ensure that the cost of protecting species does not fall unfairly on the shoulders of landowners.

"The new legislation provides for fair, balanced decision-making," says Wendy Francis, Director of Conservation and Science for Ontario Nature. "Nevertheless, we will have to be vigilant to ensure that the permitting provisions are not treated as loopholes for activities that might jeopardize a species' survival or recovery."

"The proof of the *Act*'s effectiveness will lie ultimately in its implementation," agrees Janet Sumner, Executive Director of CPAWS-Wildlands League. "There are a number of species, such as woodland caribou, that are suffering ongoing, drastic declines due to habitat loss. They require immediate attention. The Ministry of Natural Resources needs to prioritize these species to ensure that strong habitat regulations and recovery strategies are put in place and implemented without delay."

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About Save Ontario's Species (www.saveontariospecies.ca): S.O.S. is a collaboration among CPAWS Wildlands League, Environmental Defence, Ontario Nature, Sierra Legal and the David Suzuki Foundation. ForestEthics and Western Canada Wilderness Committee also support the S.O.S. Campaign.

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